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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003203

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS

REF: 10/15 BROWNFIELD/NORIEGA E-MAIL

Classified By: A/DCM Abelardo A. Arias for reason 1.4 (D)

1. (C) I presented my credentials to President Hugo Chavez October 15. We were a package of four ambassadors (Barbados, US, Norway, South Korea) handled in assembly line fashion. The President devoted roughly 15 minutes per country separately. Each ambassador took DCM plus four. In my case, the four were POL, DATT, FCS, and MGT. Chavez was accompanied by Foreign Minister Jesus Perez plus two others. We all remained together for the entire meeting. Chavez and I did all the talking.

2. (C) Chavez offered a few pleasantries to start the meeting, informing me that he likes the Cincinnati Reds and inviting me to La Orchila island to go fishing. The President then told me he wants better bilateral relations with the US. He noted my comments to FM Perez from my meeting with the Foreign Minister two weeks earlier, and said they were a good starting point. Not all bilateral issues had to be politicized, Chavez said. He recalled that when he was denied a US visa from 1992-98 he never tried to politicize that fact in Venezuela. Chavez told me he was watching the US election and he was ready to work with whoever won. The President acknowledged that there are areas and issues on which we inevitably would not agree, but he reiterated that he wanted to improve the relationship.

3. (C) I told Chavez that, as the Secretary had stated, we also wanted better relations. I noted, however, that the process had to be step by step, starting with current reality and small steps at that. We would maintain our positions on democratic institutions and human rights, I emphasized, and we would maintain positions on regional and security issues. These would be issues on which we might continue to disagree, in public and in private, I told the President, but there should be areas where we could engage in pragmatic cooperation.

4. (C) Suggesting our approach, I said the first step would be to change the tone and volume of the bilateral dialogue; also to avoid gratuitous provocation as well. We could not resolve problems, I told the President, if we did not have good communication and access. If the optics of the relationship improved, I said, I could explore with his ministers more cooperation on drugs, terrorism and energy. I cautioned again that we had to do this one step at a time, and tone down the rhetoric. Chavez agreed with that approach, and offered his presidential staff to address and resolve problems. He told me he would also be available to meet with me.
Brownfield

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